

Vocabulary Strategies Employed by Teachers and their Effect on Learners' Vocabulary Competency in Intermediate Grades

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Abstract: *This study examined the vocabulary strategies employed by English language teachers in intermediate grades and their effect on learners' vocabulary competency in Placer I District, Surigao del Norte. A mixed-method research design was utilized, involving 15 teachers and 275 learners. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire, interview guide, and pre-test and post-test assessments. Quantitative data were analyzed using weighted mean, standard deviation, and paired sample t-test, while qualitative data were treated using thematic analysis. Results revealed that teachers frequently employed strategies such as context clues, root words and affixes, student-friendly definitions, vocabulary quizzes, and storytelling. Learners' vocabulary competency significantly improved from pre-test to post-test levels across Grades 4–6, with all results yielding statistically significant differences ($p < .001$). Teachers identified challenges such as limited resources, time constraints, and learner diversity but addressed these through adaptive strategies. The findings highlight the effectiveness of varied, contextualized, and strategic vocabulary instruction in improving learners' language proficiency.*

Keywords: vocabulary strategies, vocabulary competency, intermediate learners, English language teaching, mixed-method.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is widely recognized as a fundamental component of language proficiency, enabling learners to comprehend, express, and communicate effectively across macro language skills. In intermediate grades, vocabulary development becomes increasingly important as learners transition from basic literacy to more advanced reading and language use. Without sufficient lexical knowledge, learners encounter difficulties in processing texts, constructing meaning, and participating in classroom discourse (Nation, 2021).

Recent studies emphasize that vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure, contextualized use, and strategic instruction (Webb & Nation, 2021). Furthermore, vocabulary acquisition is not merely the memorization of word meanings but involves understanding word form, meaning, and use in context (Schmitt, 2020). Despite these advancements, vocabulary instruction remains a challenge in many ESL contexts, including the Philippines, where teachers face issues such as limited resources, diverse learner needs, and insufficient exposure to English (Bautista & Gonzales, 2021).

While several studies have explored vocabulary instruction, there is limited localized research documenting the actual strategies employed by teachers and their effectiveness in improving learners' vocabulary competency. This gap highlights the need for context-specific investigations that capture real classroom practices.

Thus, this study aimed to examine the vocabulary strategies employed by teachers in intermediate grades and determine their effect on learners' vocabulary competency. Specifically, it sought to identify commonly used strategies, determine their extent of utilization, assess learners' vocabulary competency before and after implementation, examine significant differences, and explore teachers' challenges and coping strategies.



Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to examine the vocabulary strategies employed by English language teachers in intermediate grades and their effect on learners' vocabulary competency. Specifically, it sought to:

Identify the vocabulary strategies employed by English language teachers in intermediate grades;

Determine the extent of utilization of these vocabulary strategies in classroom instruction;

Assess the level of learners' vocabulary competency before and after the implementation of the following strategies:

Context clues;

Root words, prefixes, and suffixes;

Student-friendly definitions;

Vocabulary quizzes; and

Storytelling using vocabulary;

Determine whether there is a significant difference in learners' vocabulary competency before and after the implementation of the identified vocabulary strategies;

Examine teachers' perspectives, including the challenges encountered and coping strategies employed in implementing vocabulary instruction; and

Develop a vocabulary proficiency intervention program based on the findings of the study.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a **mixed-method research design**, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of vocabulary strategies and their impact on learners' competency. The quantitative component measured the extent of strategy utilization and learners' performance, while the qualitative component explored teachers' perspectives and experiences .

Participants

The study involved **15 English teachers and 275 intermediate learners (Grades 4–6)** from selected public elementary schools in Placer I District, Surigao del Norte. The participants were selected using purposive and proportionate sampling to ensure representation across different school contexts .

Table 1. Distribution of Participants

<i>School</i>	<i>Teacher Population</i>	<i>Learner Population</i>	<i>Teacher Participants</i>	<i>Learner Participants</i>
<i>Placer Central Elementary School (PCEs)</i>	28	659	3	108
<i>Placer West Central Elementary School (PWCEs)</i>	25	567	3	111
<i>Lakandula Elementary School (LES)</i>	8	123	3	18
<i>Panhutongan Elementary School (PAN.ES)</i>	8	125	3	21
<i>Tagbongabong Elementary School (TES)</i>	8	97	3	17
Total	77	1,571	15	275

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in Placer I District, Surigao del Norte, Philippines. The district comprises a combination of central, barrio, and island schools, providing diverse instructional settings in terms of learner population, accessibility, and availability of educational resources. Central schools typically have larger enrolments and better facilities, while barrio and island schools experience limitations in instructional materials and



access to technology. The learners in these schools are primarily from multilingual backgrounds, where English is used as a second language in formal instruction. These contextual characteristics offer a realistic representation of vocabulary instruction in varied classroom environments and highlight the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in implementing vocabulary strategies in intermediate grades. Figure 1 shows the map of Placer.



Figure 1. Map of Placer

Research Instruments

Data were collected using:

Researcher-designed survey questionnaire

Interview guide

Pre-test and post-test assessments

Lesson plans integrating vocabulary strategies

These instruments were validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha .

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using weighted mean, standard deviation, and paired sample t-test, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic and content analysis.



Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the appropriate educational authorities and school heads. Participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and **informed consent** was secured prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were given the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not disclosing any identifying information, and all data were used solely for academic purposes. These procedures ensured that the study adhered to established ethical standards in educational research

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Vocabulary Strategies Employed by Teachers

The findings revealed that teachers employed a wide range of vocabulary strategies, with **context clues, root words and affixes, student-friendly definitions, vocabulary quizzes, and storytelling** emerging as the most frequently utilized .

These strategies reflect a combination of explicit and implicit instructional approaches. Context clues and storytelling support contextualized learning, while morphological analysis enhances learners' ability to decode unfamiliar words. This aligns with Nation (2021), who emphasized that effective vocabulary instruction requires both meaning-focused and form-focused strategies.

Table II. Most Frequently Employed Vocabulary Strategies

<i>Vocabulary Strategy</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Rank</i>
<i>Context Clues</i>	100	Very Highly Practiced	1
<i>Root Words, Prefixes, and Suffixes</i>	93	Very Highly Practiced	2.5
<i>Storytelling Using Vocabulary</i>	93	Very Highly Practiced	2.5
<i>Student-Friendly Definitions</i>	93	Very Highly Practiced	2.5
<i>Vocabulary Quizzes</i>	93	Very Highly Practiced	2.5

3.2 Extent of Utilization of Vocabulary Strategies

The overall extent of utilization was rated as “**Often**” (WM = 4.00), indicating that teachers consistently implement vocabulary strategies in their instruction .

Highly utilized strategies included student-friendly definitions (WM = 4.60), vocabulary quizzes (WM = 4.47), and context clues (WM = 4.33). These findings suggest that teachers prioritize strategies that are practical, accessible, and directly linked to comprehension.

However, strategies such as personal vocabulary journals (WM = 3.07) and digital tools (WM = 3.40) were less utilized, indicating potential gaps in promoting learner autonomy and technology integration. This supports findings by Garcia (2023), who noted that technology integration remains limited in many ESL classrooms.

Table III. Extent of Utilization of Vocabulary Strategies

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Student-Friendly Definitions</i>	4.60	Always
<i>Vocabulary Quizzes</i>	4.47	Always
<i>Context Clues</i>	4.33	Always
<i>Reading Aloud</i>	4.33	Always
<i>Vocabulary in Writing</i>	4.27	Always
<i>Digital Tools and Apps</i>	3.40	Often
<i>Personal Vocabulary Journals</i>	3.07	Sometimes
Overall Mean	4.00	Often



3.3 Learners' Vocabulary Competency

Results showed a significant improvement in learners' vocabulary competency across all grade levels.

For Grade 4 learners, the mean score increased from **26.39 (Satisfactory)** to **38.61 (Very Satisfactory)** after the intervention. Similar improvements were observed in Grades 5 and 6.

The greatest improvement was observed in storytelling-based activities, highlighting the effectiveness of contextualized and communicative tasks in vocabulary learning. This supports Swain (1985), who emphasized that output-based activities enhance language acquisition.

Table IV. Summary of Vocabulary Competency (Pre-test vs Post-test)

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Pre-test Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Post-test Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Grade 4</i>	26.39	Satisfactory	38.61	Very Satisfactory
<i>Grade 5</i>	24.45	Fairly Satisfactory	35.78	Very Satisfactory
<i>Grade 6</i>	5.56	Satisfactory	7.73	Very Satisfactory

The findings indicate that learners improved from **lower competency levels to very satisfactory performance**, demonstrating the effectiveness of the strategies

3.4 Significant Difference in Vocabulary Competency

The paired sample t-test results revealed **statistically significant differences** ($p < .001$) between pre-test and post-test scores across all strategies.

The large effect sizes indicate that the implemented vocabulary strategies had a strong impact on learners' vocabulary development. These findings confirm that strategic and varied vocabulary instruction significantly enhances learners' lexical competence.

Table V. Summary of Paired Sample t-test Results

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Context Clues</i>	< .001	Significant
<i>Root Words & Affixes</i>	< .001	Significant
<i>Student-Friendly Definitions</i>	< .001	Significant
<i>Vocabulary Quizzes</i>	< .001	Significant
<i>Storytelling</i>	< .001	Significant
Overall	< .001	Significant

All results indicate **significant improvement**, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis

3.5 Challenges in Vocabulary Instruction

Teachers identified several challenges, including:

Time constraints

Limited instructional resources

Large class sizes

Learner diversity

These findings are consistent with Cruz and Diaz (2022), who reported that instructional limitations affect the implementation of effective vocabulary strategies.

Table VI. Summary of Challenges and Coping Strategies

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Coping Strategies</i>
<i>Time constraints</i>	Task simplification
<i>Limited resources</i>	Use of available materials
<i>Large class sizes</i>	Grouping strategies
<i>Learner diversity</i>	Differentiated instruction
<i>Low learner engagement</i>	Interactive activities



These findings indicate that teachers are **adaptive and resilient**, adjusting their practices to meet classroom demands.

3.6 Coping Strategies Employed by Teachers

To address these challenges, teachers employed adaptive strategies such as:

Differentiated instruction

Interactive and collaborative activities

Contextualized teaching approaches

These strategies reflect teachers' responsiveness to classroom realities and align with constructivist principles that emphasize learner-centered instruction (Teng, 2022).

Table VII. Key Components of the Intervention Program

<i>Component</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Strategy Enhancement</i>	Strengthen effective strategies (context clues, storytelling)
<i>Technology Integration</i>	Use digital tools for vocabulary learning
<i>Differentiated Instruction</i>	Address diverse learner needs
<i>Teacher Training</i>	Improve instructional competence
<i>Assessment Improvement</i>	Use varied evaluation methods

The program aims to enhance vocabulary instruction and improve learners' competency

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the vocabulary strategies employed by English language teachers in intermediate grades and their effect on learners' vocabulary competency. The findings revealed that teachers utilize a diverse range of vocabulary strategies, with context clues, root words and affixes, student-friendly definitions, vocabulary quizzes, and storytelling emerging as the most frequently practiced approaches. These strategies reflect a balanced integration of explicit instruction and contextualized learning, demonstrating that teachers recognize the importance of both form-focused and meaning-focused vocabulary instruction in supporting learners' language development.

In terms of utilization, vocabulary strategies were generally applied at a high level, indicating that teachers consistently incorporate them into their instructional practices. However, the variation in the extent of utilization suggests that teachers tend to favor strategies that are practical, accessible, and directly applicable to classroom contexts. Conversely, strategies that require additional time, resources, or technological support—such as digital tools and learner-managed vocabulary journals—were less frequently implemented. This highlights the influence of contextual factors, including resource availability and instructional constraints, on teachers' pedagogical choices.

The results further demonstrated a significant improvement in learners' vocabulary competency across all grade levels following the implementation of the identified strategies. Learners progressed from satisfactory and fairly satisfactory levels in the pre-test to very satisfactory levels in the post-test, indicating substantial gains in vocabulary knowledge and application. Among the strategies, storytelling and morphological analysis showed particularly strong effects, suggesting that approaches that promote active engagement, contextualized use, and deeper processing of vocabulary are especially effective. The statistical analysis confirmed that these improvements were significant, thereby validating the effectiveness of the vocabulary strategies in enhancing learners' lexical competence.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identified several challenges encountered by teachers, including time constraints, limited instructional resources, large class sizes, and diverse learner proficiency levels. These challenges reflect the complex nature of vocabulary instruction in real classroom settings, particularly in ESL contexts where exposure to the target language may be limited. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrated adaptability and resilience by employing various coping strategies such as differentiated instruction, interactive activities, and contextualized teaching approaches. These practices enabled them to address learners' needs and sustain effective vocabulary instruction despite existing constraints.



Based on the findings, the study concludes that vocabulary instruction in intermediate grades is most effective when it is **strategic, varied, and context-responsive**. The integration of multiple instructional approaches—particularly those that emphasize meaningful use, repeated exposure, and learner engagement—significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, the success of vocabulary instruction is not solely dependent on the strategies themselves but also on how teachers adapt these strategies to their specific classroom contexts.

Ultimately, this study underscores the critical role of teachers as facilitators of vocabulary development and highlights the need for continued support through professional development, resource provision, and instructional innovation. Strengthening these areas will ensure more effective and sustainable vocabulary instruction, thereby contributing to improved language proficiency and academic success among learners.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction in intermediate grades.

First, **English language teachers** are encouraged to further diversify their instructional strategies by integrating both traditional and innovative approaches to vocabulary teaching. While commonly used strategies such as context clues, student-friendly definitions, and vocabulary quizzes have proven effective, greater emphasis should be placed on underutilized strategies such as **technology-based tools, digital applications, and learner-managed vocabulary journals**. These approaches can promote learner autonomy, engagement, and long-term retention of vocabulary. Additionally, teachers should continue to apply **differentiated instruction and scaffolding techniques** to address diverse learner needs and proficiency levels.

Second, **school administrators** should provide continuous **professional development programs and training workshops** focusing on effective vocabulary instruction, assessment strategies, and technology integration. Enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills and digital competence will enable them to implement a wider range of strategies more effectively. Administrators should also ensure the availability of **instructional materials, digital resources, and classroom support systems** to facilitate innovative and interactive vocabulary teaching.

Third, **curriculum developers and education planners** are encouraged to design and implement **context-responsive and flexible instructional frameworks** that emphasize task-based, communicative, and learner-centered vocabulary instruction. The integration of vocabulary development across subject areas and learning competencies should be strengthened to ensure consistent and meaningful exposure to vocabulary in various contexts.

Fourth, **future researchers** are encouraged to expand this line of inquiry by exploring **technology-enhanced vocabulary instruction**, learners' perspectives on vocabulary learning strategies, and the long-term impact of these strategies on language proficiency. Further studies may also consider larger sample sizes, different educational levels, or comparative analyses across regions to provide more comprehensive insights.

Finally, the proposed **Vocabulary Proficiency Intervention Program** developed in this study should be implemented, monitored, and evaluated in actual classroom settings. Continuous assessment and refinement of the program are recommended to ensure its effectiveness, sustainability, and adaptability to different learning environments.

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